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Press Release

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ATTORNEY GENERAL MCGRAW WARNS CONSUMERS ABOUT GROUPS FRAUDULENTLY CLAIMING TO BE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Attorney General Darrell McGraw today warned consumers to beware of callers and door-to-door solicitors fraudulently claiming to be representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or groups that assist with FEMA applications. Such groups have been calling flood victims and asking them for their checking account numbers to debit a \$295 "processing fee" from the accounts. There is no fee for filing an application for assistance from FEMA.

In one such scam, a person telephones flood victims and identifies himself as a FEMA representative. This person already has the victim's identifying information and the bank routing number, or numerical address for the consumer's bank. The caller tells the victim that he needs the victim's checking account number so that he can debit a \$295 "processing fee" from the account; then \$25,000 will be direct deposited into the account within 10 days. According to the caller, the victim will not be required to repay the money if it is used for flood repairs or relocation. The scamster also gives the victim a toll-free number to call, 1-800-551-7099. When the victim calls that number no one answers; however, victims who have called the number have received additional calls from the phony FEMA agent.

Another scam is identical to the scam described above except that the phony FEMA representative tells the victim he will send a "Disaster Victims Assistance Guide" once the fee is debited from the victim's checking account.

A third such scam is done by persons who go door to door. Those involved in this scam claim to represent "Outreach America" and describe the organization as one that helps victims repair their homes and register with FEMA. These scamsters try to get the victim to give out his or her bank account number and identifying information during the course of the conversation.

Attorney General Darrell McGraw warns, "Giving out banking account numbers may result in unauthorized withdrawals from the consumer's account. Beware of giving out personal information or bank account numbers to anyone who does not show proof of his identity." Consumers who have had such unauthorized withdrawals should contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division to file complaints.

For more information about this activity, information about disaster assistance, or consumer complaint form, contact Attorney General McGraw's Consumer Protection Division by calling 1-800-368-8808, by writing P.O. Box 1789, Charleston, WV 25326-1789. Consumers may also report such scams to the FEMA Inspector General's Fraud Hotline at 1-800-323-8603.

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